

Elective C-sections okay: After years of campaigning to reduce the number of surgical deliveries, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has declared it's the physician's decision. According to the ACOG, "if the physician believes that [cesarean] delivery promotes the overall health and welfare of the woman and her fetus more than vaginal birth, he or she is ethically justified in performing the surgery." The statement is not *carte blanche* permission to perform the procedure; rather, it sets an ethical context for making the decision. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada plans to release its first guidelines on elective cesarean sections this year. "It's a widely debated subject," said SOGC spokesperson Dan Morier. "Patient-physician discussion is extremely important so patients understand the risks."

eCMAJ survey results: During the last 2 weeks of September, CMAJ used an online survey to collect demographic information on eCMAJ users and to solicit their opinions on the journal's Web content. Approximately 7500 users from over 100 countries completed the survey. To view tabulated results, see www.cmaj.ca

CMA's Western president-elect: Dr. Ruth Collins-Nakai was elected over 7 other candidates as Alberta Medical Association's (AMA) nominee for CMA's 2004 president-elect. If confirmed at the CMA General Council next August, she will serve as CMA president in 2005/06. Collins-Nakai, a pediatric clinical cardiologist and health care consultant, is a former president of the AMA.



Alberta Medical Association

Aboriginal physicians wanted: The Native Physicians Association of Canada (NPAC) is looking for new members after several years of relative inactivity due to the withdrawal of federal funding. A slate of officers will be elected Jan. 24 at an annual meeting held in conjunction with the Canadian Aboriginal Leaders in Medicine group, which supports students and residents. The 2 groups plan to work together, with NPAC providing mentors to students. NPAC will also support practising Aboriginal physicians and encourage youth to enter the profession, says NPAC's interim coordinator, Dr. Janet Smylie. For information email jk.smylie@sympatico.ca

Nova Scotia district slashes overtime: In the wake of a \$10-million shortfall, Nova Scotia's largest district health authority has restricted overtime work to "exceptional circumstances." This will save \$1.2 million. Attendant care workers are also being eliminated, and employees off work due to illness or other reasons will not be replaced, says Capital Health District CEO Don Ford. Nurses' unions and health care critics are protesting the cuts, but Health Minister Angus MacIsaac supports them. Capital Health received a 7.5% budget increase from the province this year, but expenses have increased 9.5%. — *Donalee Moulton, Halifax*

The medium is the (distorted) message: News coverage of health issues is seriously out of whack with actual risks to health, reports a British charitable foundation. Researchers compared the number of health-related stories on specific health risks in 3 TV news programs and 3 newspapers with the actual number of deaths attrib-

uted to those risks. For example, 8571 people died from smoking for each news story on the health risks of smoking, compared with 0.33 deaths for each story on variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The study, by The King's Fund, concluded that the media are skewed toward dramatic health scares, rather than issues that have a much greater impact on health, such as obesity and alcohol abuse.

11-year drop in Russian lifespan: Alcohol abuse and outdated public health policies are fuelling a health crisis in Russia. The average Russian consumes 15 L of alcohol per year, and about 40 000 die annually from alcohol poisoning. The ministry of health estimates 1 in 3 deaths is alcohol related. There are also serious public health concerns. An estimated 1.5 million people are now HIV-positive, and that figure is expected to quadruple within 5 years. Life expectancy for men has plummeted from 70 years a decade ago to 59 years today. If nothing is done, the Russian population may decline by half over the next 70 years, states the health ministry.



Barbara Sibbald

First woman to head FIGO: For the first time ever a woman will become president of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) — and she's a Canadian. Dr. Dorothy Shaw, past-president of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada and a faculty member at the University of BC, became FIGO president-elect in November. Her term as president begins in 2006. — Compiled by *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*